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An Essay
on the
Non Existence of a Syphilitic Virus
for the Degree of
Doctor of Medicine
in the
University of Pennsylvania
by
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On the
Non Existence of a Syphilitic Virus

As is well known it was about the end of the fifteenth century, that Europe was invaded by a disease, which on all sides as we are told, spread alarm horror, and death, and of which it is said the present Syphilis is a modification.

The writers by whom this disease was first described were far from considering it a new affection; on the contrary they looked upon it as a disease known to the Ancients, but having assumed an epidemical character, influenced by the atmosphere & became a general plague, which, after having raged for several years with great fury, gradually disappeared, leaving behind phenomena analogous to those described by antiquity.

It was at this period, Ignorance, as writer has termed it, the "Mother of Credulity" forced every mind

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to yield to her sway. the disease was therefore attributed to the influence of the constellations, and the conjuncture of the planets - The cause was afterwards according to the Galenic doctrine, thought to consist in a certain morbid constitution of the humours, which, originating in the liver propagated itself to the genital organs - The alimentary substances were also accused, after this, the state of the atmosphere, and the inclemencies of the seasons - Finally, the theories of the times upon the nature and qualities of the periodical discharges of women, led to the admission of a Specific Virus, which, produces all those affections denominated Syphilis, and we find that it was not until the admission of this virus, that the disease termed Venereal attracted much attention, not because it was not known but, because it was not yet thought to arise from a cause susceptible of infinite variation in form, character, and intensity in its effects -

As at present we are told the Venereal affection has always produced a total wasting and weakness of the

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powers of the system, from which arose a number of cachetic affections, so that when the Venereal Virus was discovered it was not long ere the diseases the necessary consequence of a state of feebleness and irritation were attributed to its presence –

By the advocates of this virus, contagion is looked upon as a proof of its existence – To this, those of the opposite opinion are far from assenting, and to support their views, they bring forward as the cause the change in the secretions by inflammation, which renders them so acrid as to produce irritation and inflammation of the same nature as the original in the part to which they are applied – As examples to this effect Coryza Dysentery &c have been given –

In the first we are told an excoriation of the upper lip frequently takes place, and in some cases is covered by a scab and according to Des Bois and other highly respectable authors, the mucous secreted in these cases will cause the same irritation to be developed in persons

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who experience its contact be it by embracing or by using the same Handkerchief - This he says he has frequently witnessed and he mentions one case in particular, where the wife of his friend became similarly affected by embracing her husband whilst labouring under coryza.

Is it here necessary asks Dr Bruns to have recourse to a virus to explain this contagion? He answers certainly not - Because we can easily conceive, that when the secretory organs are affected their secretions become altered and by their acrid qualities they are enabled to cause an irritation in the part to which they are applied - Why then he asks should it be otherwise with that irritation termed Venereal?

By recurring to the alle explanation offered by Dr Harris, and to which Dr Bruns and others lend their support, we can readily perceive, how the venereal disease can be propagated without the admission of any specific virus - The following are his words "Women who yield to an immoderate indulgence in venereal pleasures who

were thoroughly imbued with a number of more or less marked excretion, and consequent inflammation, and for a want of a proper ventilation from the matter contained in them were a very old and irritating, and a more frequently inflammation and ulceration in the part to which they are attached.

To the above authorities who said their patient to have had this examination. Mr. Tom was a little, who was present as we are informed at the examination of two hundred women of the most order and the most frequented by the soldiers. Among the large number of a case of chronic disease was found matter in the military hospitals intended to have their wards number of cases.

This we think proves conclusively that tartar pus, which is thought to be one of the principal of the inherent uses, depends mostly on the alteration of the secretions or rather the ulceration caused by inflammation much but by the greater or less coldness of the secretion to be

find though these women were healthy before having connexion with the soldiers, from the irritation and consequent inflammation caused by after their husbands enabled to communicate the disease learned [illegible] to those women with whom they had connexion.

As a further evidence that contagion depends upon the acridness of the secretion, we are told by the same authors, that, from a neglect of cleanliness, the secretions around the prepuce become so acrid as to cause excoriation, and ulceration of this part, and, that this purely local affection will communicate itself to other individuals and cause a series of accidents of no little moment.

This opinion we find is not of modern date, for both Mahomet and Moses were aware of this neglect of cleanliness and hence introduced circumcision as a religious ceremony, and it is thought the same views caused the Moorish women to amputate the Nymphæ and Clitoris.

We also find this contagious influence, to be in some measure regulated by the susceptibility of the indi-

venal, as well as the acridness of the secretion. As illustrating this opinion the following example is given by Des Bois. Six periods after a frugal repast had successively connection with the same women, from whom all contracted the venereal disease. It appeared as we shall find in Chapter 4 hours proportioned to the susceptibility of the individual. Two of them had Chancres and Bubes, two Gonorrhea, the fifth Chancres, and the sixth Pus.

It may here be asked if these phenomena can be explained by a specific virus? How can we by this virus account for the mildness of the disease in one case and its severity in others. But on the other hand a satisfactory explanation can be given by having recourse to the sensibility of the urethral mucous modified by the intensity of the inflammation: for if instead of coition, these phenomena had been produced by other irritants as Vegetable Acids &c would they not have been explained upon these principles? Would not they be accounted for in this way? The irritation operating upon the extremity of the Urethra, it inflamed, and

as common to the mucous surface its secretions were more or less increased and altered, and thus a catarrhal disease termed gonorrhea

In two others the glans being the most sensible inflammation took place which followed, which is called Chancre, and from the contiguity of the individual the irritation extended down to the Inguinal glands where it occasioned an engagement termed Bubo.

If then these sores produced by caustic or other irritants can be accounted for in this way, why should we seek for an other explanation to account for the irritation and ulceration produced by contagion? Could not this irritation extend and produce Buboes?

To show that contagion is modified by the intensity of the inflammation we have but to refer to gonorrhea and here we find a striking example.

This disease during an intense or lively inflammation readily propagates itself by contagion as is seen in regard, but when it assumes the form termed specific this power

and if we were the propagation of this disease dependent on a specific virus, it ought also in this form to be contagious to man, as Dr. Murray has shewn it is upon cattle, as a "specific virus" and as such ought to propagate itself in the human system. But this cannot matter as we find it not the case, and they both upon it as a most true debility of lungs and breaking down vacation and debility of the mucous membrane of the alimentary, as we find it not to record all inflammations of the mucous membranes.

Having now endeavoured to prove that the disease considered general can propagate itself without the virus, I a specific virus it is now incumbent to consider that form termed secondary syphilis, which by the inoculations of this virus is proved to arise from a growing its existence, which by its absorption produces those constitutional symptoms denominated secondary syphilis.

By these two accurate experiments we are to

that this cause introduced under the which would occasion an intermission of greater or less intensity and, after an indefinite raise of time direct itself towards the original rate when it announced by an augmentation of the original grounds which general Rule

To distinguish this from Pulses arising from other causes various external circumstances have been given, but, these as compared by nearly all writers on this subject are insensible by those indices of other instants hence they were tried to resort to some other mode of proof this affection might be distinguished and this we find, to be the history of the patient, who, should he confess an impure action would be said to be labouring under a General Rule.

This diagnostic of those of the physical cause is thought sufficient to the task, for it may be asked, if the symptoms of a General Rule can be produced by other instants, as wounds, or over a run the toes, why should we resort to a specific cause to account for its ob-

vacance became it followed an injury or fever? could it not have been attributed to the excitability of the individual and the extreme irritation of eyes in the non-the cases? Does the introduction of a virus carried into the ganglions and irritating them explain more than the cause of its disappearance? Or show that this engorgement is influenced in the extremes of irritation which is proportioned to the degree of inflammation and the excitability of the individual we have not to attribute to this practice this theory gave rise to and to the experiments of M. Bell.

By the former we find that entertaining the above views some physicians thought the disease might be removed and the system protected from infection by searching the diseased parts. For this purpose Des Pres & Ms. some have proposed the extirpation of the seat of disease. others, the cauterization of ulcers on their first appearance. We asks what has been the result of their practice? It is answered with the greatest number of

rather the wounds inflamed, tubes were produced, and venous sinuses formed. But these we are told were not attributed to the irritation produced by the remedy, but that the remedy had not been sufficiently active to destroy the virus which in their efforts to effect they caused to be thrown upon the Inguinal Glands.

This explanation we think is valuable but for its ingenuity, for it certainly does not afford a satisfactory examination of the appearance of a Bubo. But on the contrary by the extension of irritation, we can readily conceive that the degree of inflammation caused the remedies would rapidly invade the inguinal glands as the following experiments of Mr. Bell go to prove.

According to this able experimentalist we find that out of ten cases where caustic was applied to the cases all but two were affected with Bubes, and in the others, two of which were treated by Mercury and the with nitric acid only one suffered from a Bubo, and it occurred among those treated with Mercury.

Thus it is thought it has not been proved that the secondary affection called Bubo, is merely the result of the extension of a local irritation modified by the degree of inflammation and susceptibility of the integument and not to the passage of a virus into the glands

This theory we think is very plausible in admitting the decay of the cells on some part of the body, from irritation or injury, or we are told that men who are accustomed to have connexion with a woman retain their health, whilst a stranger would be in the connexion with her, will receive the infection. If we regard the disease denominated Venereal virus to be a common contagion this fact can be readily understood, but on the other, if it acts on the principle of a virus it cannot be so easily explained, for according to Dr. Bros. admitting the genital organs become accustomed to this virus, we cannot suppose the glands can also become accustomed to it, for if these organs could be habituated to the substances with which they are placed in contact the same would not be

maintained for a long time as the hydraulic refill returned to the tube, and no inner inner or this motion ceased and all the functions would be arrested.

In the other hand if the venom is not become so habituated to the venom it ought always to be carried into the nervous and produce a general in action

From this we conclude the venom would not remain as we have said in the vessels for an indefinite intervalle of time on account of the very activity being imposed to the venom, for as "le venin est" venom "venom" we see in que le venin introduit dans une partie quelconque du corps du cavial ou du cobaye tournant se soustraire à l'action de celui des vaisseaux absorbants. Par cette manière expliquer le retour prolongé rendant les animaux atteints de venin dans quelque cas de l'envenimation, nous produit instantanément une série des symptômes sans doute, nous l'trouvons ici nous avec les autres.

From these remarks we infer it must be injected and it is by the assorption of this venom into the system,

that it reveals given rise affections sympathetic secondary symptoms. But these secondary symptoms which are confined chiefly to the skin and stomach, by those of an obtuse character, is thought to point out the intimate sympathy which exists between these parts and the organs of generation, and by this sympathy may we account the appearance of these secondary symptoms.

To show more intimately the organs of generation are connected with all parts of the body, we have only to attend to Dewees and others by whom we are told, that sensibility is distributed in different degrees in different tissues of the economy, and those tissues which possess it in the greatest degree, were more capable of receiving of stimuli, and transmit it to others in proportion to their degree of connexion. The organs of generation in fact, possess this power in an eminent degree, and to trace their connexion with the other parts of the body he gives us a familiar example.

We say from the general dose we find that in the cases of some there an increased sensibility which is not relieved anywhere else than in the increased heat of the body, the glittering eyes, the accelerated pulse, the hurried breath, the dry mouth, and in that general condition, we call insanity, when the disease is gratified.

It is now the very principle that we find the heart most generally but affected and not by a sensitive when is said to be similar to this nerves and we now proceed to consider the intimate sympathy which exists between the organs of generation and this heart.

By the first we are told that the organs of generation not only exercise a marked influence over the nervous system of the mouth and hypogastric over the nerves the tonsils and neighbouring parts.

To find out for this danger we have but to refer to the change of voice at puberty. At which time it becomes louder and stronger, which an excited nervous

it retains its delicate and feminine tone. So striking does Dr Gross think this sympathy, that he asks who hasn't marked the masculine voices of the women at the lower extremity, those as he expresses it "qui sont dans le monde depuis long temps" he continues by saying we care not to hear them and we recognize their bagpipes.

As an other example of this intimate sympathy Dr Gross relates a case of a young man, who could not sleep a night with a woman without presenting the next morning swollen tonsils and suffering from difficult deglutition.

Having now endeavoured by a few examples to show the close sympathy between the organs of generation and the throat, and by it to explain that affection of the throat termed Secondary Syphilis, we propose now to consider the sympathetic tie between the organs of generation and the skin, and by it, to account for those affections of the skin called under the head of Secondary Syphilis, and to show these affections are not always cause-

cutive to syphilitic sore throat. In support of this opinion a number of cases are related by Des Bruis, where an affection of the skin was consecutive to an irritation of the genital organs. The following was selected from those given by the above author, and will be given in his own words "Je sait une dame des lèsions vénériens sont continuées pendant long temps, ou l'on qu'au contraire on se livre à l'onanism des boutons noirbeux et rougeâtres se manifestent sur differentes parties du corps surtout au front ou autours des ailes du nez." Another which is related by the same authors is of a man, who, from the operation of phymosis suffered from copper blotches upon the skin analogous to those termed Venereal.

These cases we think illustrate sufficiently the intimate connexion existing between the genital organs and the skin, and as where a former occasion, it is by this connexion we explain those affections of the skin denominated syphilitic. By the last case we also find that these secondary affections do not observe any particular routine in

their appearance is not special to the idiosyncracies of the individual. It is by these intimate sympathies which exist between the organs of generation and the different parts of body, bearing in mind that sensibility is distributed in different degrees in different tissues, and those which possess it in the greatest degree receive more more easily the impression of stimuli, and transmit it to others in proportion to their degree of connexion, that we account for those affections denominated secondary syphilis, for we find the organs of generation to possess the highest degree of sensibility, and as has been shown by Des Brus Devergie and others their connexion with various parts of the body are very close, hence, we can readily conceive that those affections termed secondary syphilis, will arise from the transmission of the irritation by Sympathy.

These sympathies we are told by the above authors are sufficient to explain the development of secondary syphilis and by the same we are also informed, that when an irritation has existed for a time upon the organs

of generation the different parts which sympathize with them and especially the mucous follicles, are excited and disposed to take on irritation. This disposition says Dr Bruce, may last for a greater or less space of time, and may be more or less evident in different individuals, and if persons, liable under these circumstances exposed themselves to irritating causes morbid phenomena will result. Thus we observe consecutive accidents of the throat in individuals, who, a short time after their marriage, pay themselves to the excesses of the table, or who, abandon themselves to too frequent coition. In the same way we see the arms of persons, who a short time after their marriage, walk, ride too much, especially during the heat of the summer, and in persons who keep here, they between the buttocks are fixed pimples excoriations &c. It may here be asked, if it be more difficult to conceive the developement of these secondary affections than it is to understand the appearance of aphthae in the mouth and ulcers in the throat, which are frequently consecutive to Gastritis. Nothing

In these cases we do not require a specific virus to explain these phenomena, on the contrary, sympathy is invoked, and not, a satisfactory explanation is thought to be given. Why then is it, we should act differently for those affections consecutive to the irritation of the genital organs? What is it that authorizes this difference? What authorizes us with Barthez, to attribute the morbid phenomena by which we are affected to a specific virus, besides he says, it ought to be explained how this wonderful being can remain quiet for so long a time in the system and suddenly awake, and act upon the orifices of the mucous membrane or upon the skin, for it is allowed so acrid is this virulent that it causes phlegmons in the part to which it is applied, yet by the advocates of a specific virus we are told it can be taken into the system where it can remain for years without producing any effect. It also remains says the same author to prove that these affections supposed to be specific present a peculiar character and differ from those affections which we know not to be specific

By the substitution of this word it is said, that it is difficult to conceive that an ulcer of so small an extent which is undoubtedly a chronic variety can cause sympathetic suppuration when, to give rise to the development of so great a number of ends it is said to be consecutive to hysteria.

To this Des Brus replies, that experience teaches that the consecutive phenomena are proportioned to the severity, duration and extent of the primary ulcer as shown by the secondary symptoms is a more general fact after the cauterization of ulcers than after ulcers which have not been heated in this way

To return say that for the phenomena we have not to return to the experiments of 1797, but in which the phenomena is happily illustrated, and which lead them subsequent to the phenomena that irritation modified by the idiosyncrasies of the individual is alone the cause. In other circumstances which in turn also favour the phenomena of a virus is thought to pass the existence, is, the absence of exostosis caries so give ten or fifteen years after a hen-

man was suffered from tumors syphilitic and is cured

In answer to this, notwithstanding the high author-
ity by which we shall be opposed, we who argue with Ber-
nes, who mentions, that it is difficult to explain these phe-
nomena by sympathy; but he says that these venereal evils
have no "the casual relation" with the primary affec-
tion, than that which the imagination of authors have
created, he says they are no more venereal than the Gastro
Enteritis Pleurisies, Rheumatisms, and other phlegmasia that
we observe consecutive to chancres and he continues by saying
it is as impossible to prove them of a syphilitic origin from
the primary affection, as it would be to prove these sec.
syphilitic. "Have we not asks the same author observed at
all times ulcers of the throat, exostosis caries, pustules of the
skin &c? and he continues by saying the same causes which
then produced them can without doubt at present occa-
sion them.

In support of this opinion the same author
relates numerous cases, where men suffered from tumors

of the anus ulceration of the tonsils and other affections under the head of secondary syphilis who had never had connection with women.

In this opinion Des Ruis is supported by Dr Emerson, by whom much attention has been paid to this interesting subject. To go into the details of the case related by him would be more than useless, therefore we propose to view it in a general way. In it we find a mulatto lady from a stinging ulcer on the ball of her right foot suffered the inconvenience of a bad pain in the bridge of the nose, and from a regular eruption on the hands and arms, which according to many respectable authors would be syphilitic.

To the above may be added the one related by our distinguished professor of the Institutes of Medicine where copper colored appeared from the immoderate use of Balsam Copaiva.

From the above cases, and from the testimony of other authors we find, that there affections to an

Secondary Syphilis can be produced without a venereal virus and by Des Brus and others it is asked, if it be not remarkable that without contion, and consequently without a specific virus, that pustules, caries, and other secondary syphilitic affections can be created. He goes on to say if these cases were presented to the observation of a Physician who advocates the belief of a specific virus, he would instantly doubt the chastity of his patient, but he, from the strong conviction that these as he terms them "pretendus symptomes veneriens", are but the products of irritation, does not hesitate to believe his patient, and attribute them to the above cause and not to one susceptible of such infinate variation in form character and intensity in its effects, as that denominated Syphilitic virus.

To these views of the nature of Syphilis, which are respectfully submitted to the consideration of the Faculty, I have been led by the writings and reasonings of many able members of the profession.
To have given an opinion derived from experience

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and observation at the bed side of the patient, would have been impossible in one not yet admitted to the practical duties of the profession, and who, not having entered the "Temple of Medicine", but standing on its threshold, has attentively listened to the experienced, and thus been led to the adoption of an opinion that seems rapidly extending.